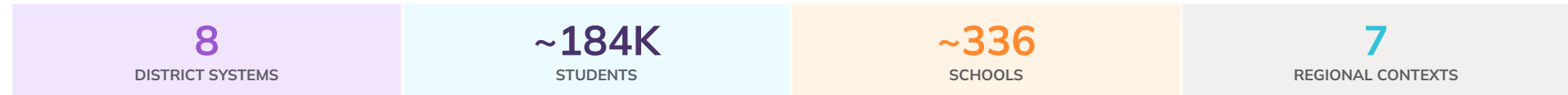


FUNDER BRIEF | NORTH CAROLINA

This District Cohort Is an Ideal MIC Learning Laboratory

A deliberately varied set of public-school systems for testing what must remain consistent – and what must adapt – as MIC scales.



Current cohort footprint based on 2024–25 NCES district counts.

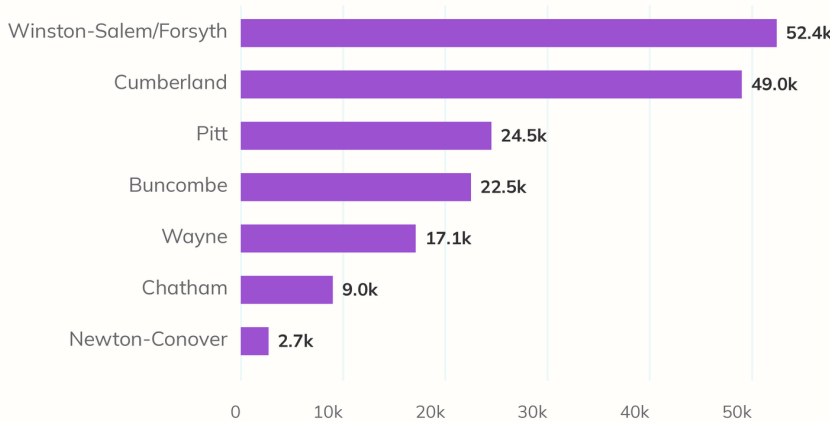
The cohort thesis

MIC is not beginning with one “typical” district. It is beginning with a purposeful comparative cohort – large enough to reveal patterns, but varied enough to expose where a statewide model must flex.

Across the eight systems, MIC can compare implementation in western mountains and eastern agricultural communities; in small city, rural-fringe, suburban, and large urban systems; and in counties experiencing very different levels of growth and economic pressure.

The benefit: MIC can identify the elements of the model that are essential everywhere – and the parts that should be locally designed.

District enrollment spans a 20-fold range



A west-to-east cross-section of North Carolina



The geographic sequence is illustrative rather than a map; region names reflect MIC's working cohort framework.

This is not a statistically representative sample. It is a deliberately heterogeneous cohort designed for cross-case learning.

COHORT COMPARISON

One cohort, very different operating conditions

The differences below are not background detail; they are the variables MIC needs in order to understand where and how a coordinated approach can travel.

Region	District	NCES locale	Students	Schools	County median household income	County poverty	Population growth	People / sq. mi.
Western	Buncombe County Schools	Suburban–large	24,872	52	\$74.4K	12.4%	+3.0%	410
Northwest	Newton-Conover City Schools	Suburban–midsize	2,562	7	\$67.9K	13.0%	+5.9%	400
Piedmont-Triad	Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools	City–large	54,441	87	\$67.2K	13.3%	+5.0%	938
North Central	Chatham County Schools	Rural–fringe	10,232	24	\$94.3K	8.7%	+11.6%	112
Sandhills	Cumberland County Schools	City–midsize	49,600	87	\$61.3K	16.5%	+1.1%	513
Northeast	Pitt County Schools	City–small	24,363	42	\$58.2K	19.8%	+6.5%	261
Southeast	Wayne County Public Schools	Rural–fringe	17,998	36	\$59.7K	19.3%	+4.2%	212
Charlotte/Southwest Piedmont	District TBD	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

District figures: 2024–25 NCES Common Core of Data. County income and poverty: 2020–24 ACS. Population growth: 2020 base to July 2025 estimate. Density: 2020 Census.

SCALE

2,654 to 52,430 students

A small system and two systems near 50,000 students test very different staffing, coordination, and change-management demands.

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

\$58K to \$94K median income

County poverty ranges from 8.5% to 19.8%, creating distinct local-capacity and philanthropic landscapes.

GROWTH PRESSURE

1.1% to 11.6% since 2020

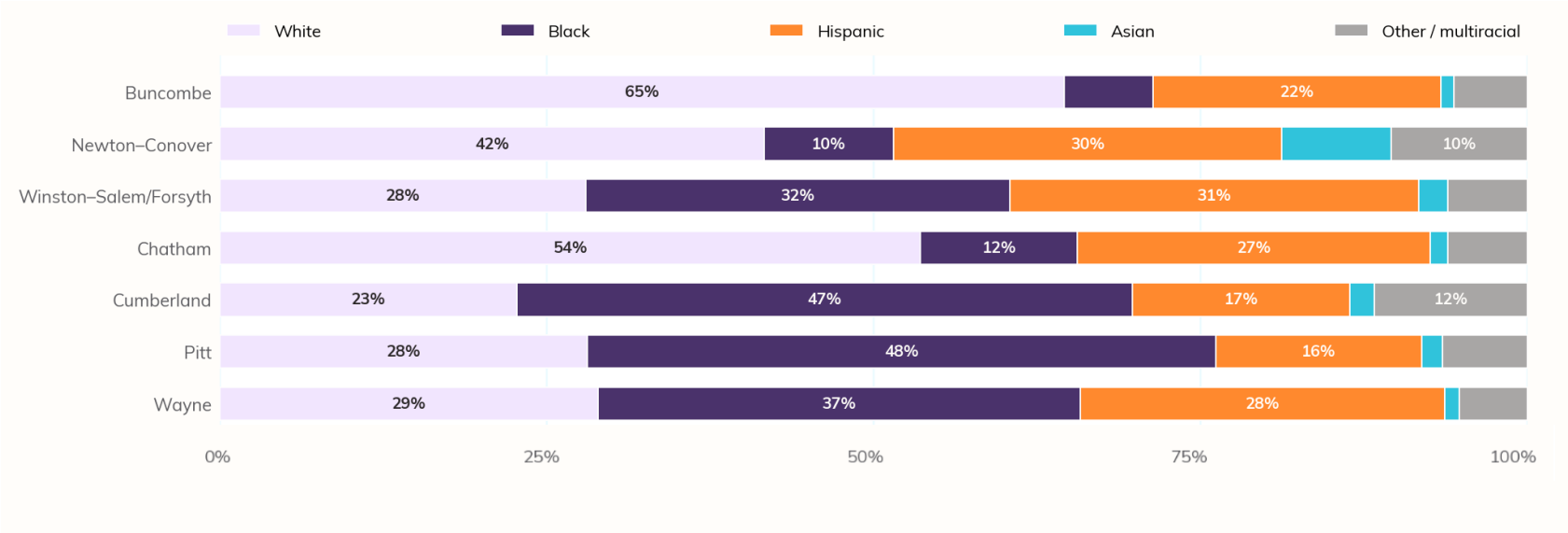
The cohort includes comparatively stable communities and some of the state’s fastest-growing counties.

Important interpretation note: county averages describe the surrounding economic context; they do not measure the circumstances of every family or school. Chatham, in particular, illustrates how strong countywide averages can coexist with rural distance and substantial internal variation.

STUDENT COMMUNITIES

The student populations are meaningfully different

No single racial or ethnic profile defines this cohort. The result is a stronger test of whether MIC’s district-led process can remain coherent while responding to very different communities.



Source: NCES CCD school membership, 2024–25; shares rounded. “Other / multiracial” includes remaining reported groups.

What each district contributes to the learning design

District	Distinctive contribution to the cohort
Buncombe County Schools	Brings the western mountain context: dispersed communities, difficult travel geography, and a mix of suburban schools, small towns, and rural valleys.
Newton-Conover City Schools	Tests whether MIC can work in a very small city system, where relationships can move quickly but staffing and specialized capacity are limited.
Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools	Provides a large urban-suburban test case with nearly equal Black, Hispanic, and White student populations and significant complexity across 80 schools.
Chatham County Schools	Pairs rapid growth and high county-level wealth with rural distance and meaningful internal variation – an important test of averages that can obscure local need.
Cumberland County Schools	Adds a large, highly diverse, military-connected system where student mobility and the operational demands of 86 schools shape implementation.
Pitt County Schools	Represents an eastern regional hub – anchored by Greenville, health care, and higher education – while still serving rural and high-poverty communities.
Wayne County Public Schools	Adds a rural eastern system with a nearly three-way Black, White, and Hispanic student mix, substantial economic need, agriculture, and a military presence.

REPLICATION CASE

Why this is a strong model for other states

The cohort’s value is not simply geographic coverage. Its value is the ability to run a common district-engagement process across very different conditions and learn where outcomes depend on context.

Variation creates useful evidence

If MIC can generate durable progress across small and large systems, rural and urban settings, and high- and lower-poverty communities, funders can have greater confidence that results are not tied to one unusually favorable environment.

A common process makes comparison possible

Each district moves through the same core sequence: assessment, district review, community scan, state context, partner alignment, funder engagement, and a multi-year granting plan. That consistency creates a basis for learning across sites.

Local adaptation is treated as a design requirement

The same grant or program is unlikely to fit a seven-school city system, an 86-school military-connected system, and a fast-growing suburban district. MIC can distinguish between the model’s non-negotiable infrastructure and the interventions that should vary.

The cohort can reveal conditions for sustainability

Cross-district comparison can show how leadership, staffing, transportation, scheduling, local partners, philanthropy, and state support affect whether expanded access to music and the arts can endure beyond an initial grant.

The replication frame

Dimension tested in North Carolina	What the cohort allows MIC to learn	What another state can replicate
Geography + access	How distance, transportation, and local partner density shape delivery.	Select districts that span the state’s real geographic operating contexts.
District scale	Which coordination structures work in a seven-school system versus an 80+ school system.	Include small, midsize, and large systems; do not pilot only where capacity is strongest.
Economic context	How local fiscal capacity and family-level need affect program design and sustainability.	Pair community economic data with district- and school-level needs assessments.
Student demographics	How language, culture, and community identity should shape engagement and programming.	Build a cohort whose students reflect materially different communities.
Growth + institutional context	How growth, mobility, staffing, military ties, and regional institutions influence execution.	Choose sites that reveal the state’s distinct implementation pressures.

The goal is not to prove that one intervention works everywhere.
It is to build a repeatable method for helping very different districts identify, fund, and sustain the right creative-learning infrastructure.

Sources and data notes

District enrollment, schools, and locale: [NCES Common Core of Data \(CCD\), 2024–25](#). Student race/ethnicity shares are rounded district-level figures compiled from 2024–25 CCD school membership records. County economic and population context: [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#) (2020–24 ACS; July 2025 population estimates; 2020 Census density).

Interpretation: This is a purposive comparison cohort, not a statistically representative sample of North Carolina or the United States. County measures provide context and should be paired with MIC's district-level assessment and local insight.